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my favorite restaurant for romance

LE CHARDONNAY

RICHARD MELTZER

As it is the *only* restaurant in Los Angeles, it goes without saying that **Damiano's Mr. Pizza** (*412 N. Fairfax Ave.; 213-658-7611*), is also the most romantic . . .

COURTSHIP AT DAMIANO'S MR. PIZZA

No time for wine, I'm writing a novel. If you want (or need) flowers, specify and you *got 'em*. Earrings, a back rub — anything within reason. Help you with the crossword, wash your dishes, cups, spoons (but not forks). No U2 or Sting . . . even passion has its limits. Maximum court time: 19 minutes. We're at 18 now, this is it, d'you want me? I've got no wine for courtship.

IN THE MEN'S ROOM OF DAMIANO'S MR. PIZZA

Mirrors can be helpful. Left side of my face is Kerouac, that classic shot of him on East Seventh Street, New York '53 — his right profile. My right is, I dunno, Sam Elliott, Bradford Dillman — someone innocuously "handsome."

Which, in the proper lighting, will get the gals? (Which will intimidate them less?)

Head on I'm Peter Falk, De Niro. (No choice there.)

A NIGHT ALONE AT DAMIANO'S MR. PIZZA

Loneness. Enfolds me like a. Like an army of pizza ants. I'm the pizza and they're the ants. There is no cheese on the pizza. No sauce, no oregano. Pepper: there's pepper. And what's loner than pepper a'la carte w/ a side of — ants *hate* pepper (will not eat it). Ants are gray and their families are shingles on the walls of Rome, Milan and Venice ("The Gray Cities"). I'm so lone I could. Die of loneness and the ants would. They'd. Sleep, perchance to. Actually loneness enfolds me like Mr. Pastafagiolo's gummy aperture on my prong.

Here comes the night!

ROBERT LLOYD

When first I wooed my current and forever squeeze, thinking to win her yet-hesitant heart, I hied her one night up Beverly Glen to the pre-Sanforized Cafe Four Oaks, which appealed on account of its history (the Glen having once been a kind of artist's colony, whose residents included inveterate loverboy Henry Miller) and its within-city-walls rusticism. I don't remember the food at all, and I don't even remember the evening being especially romantic. But then, a hot-dog stand can seem the most divinely divine spot on Earth if the "vibe" between the interested parties is right — if the interested parties are . . . interested. "A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou," spake the poet; not, "A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, a maitre d', waiter, mariachi band, pop art, and three dozen other diners. Plus a complimentary mint at the end of the evening."

Actually, it's the end of the evening I find most romantic — the coffee-and-pastry period. Tucking away the main feed demands some energy and concentration; only afterward, when all the decisions but one have been made, the java's steaming reliably below your nose and perhaps some mutually decided upon sweet waits between you and your other, can the love stuff really begin. Late at night is most classically romantic, and **Canter's** (*419 N. Fairfax Ave.; 213-651-2030*). is as good a setting as any; the lighting's a bit harsh, but there are desserts enough to please I would think most palates (they're reasonable, too); they leave you alone (more, sometimes, than is desirable); and you can sit there for hours, until the rosy dawn even, telling important stories and gazing deep into one another's starry eyes. And I've had worse coffee.

JOHN POWERS

Like everyone else, my lover and I enjoy late dinners at quiet, candle-lit restaurants where waiters move with gossamer discretion, wine fires the soul with amorous intent, glances flicker like so many dreams of ecstasy . . . et cetera. But really, the most romantic of meals is breakfast. After a night spent stirring the honey of romance (as one of those fin-de-siecle poets put it), we head to **Hal's** (*1349 W. Washington Blvd., Venice; 213-396-3105*), slide into one of the booths and, sipping excellent cups of restorative coffee, eye each other in the dawn's bleary light. My love's unruly blond hair is wilder than ever, but her beauty still thrills me. She, I'm afraid, is not so lucky: with my tired eyes and bad shave, I look like Festus Hayden on the old *Gunsmoke* show. She seems not to notice, and I slather jelly onto a muffin that seems to be made of corn or something (it's early). We make small talk, flatter one another's erotic prowess (I'm not lying), and by the time our orders have arrived, we are giggling about some joke that only the two of us could giggle about. We have been together a long time, my lover and I, and each of us eats according to a pattern familiar to the other. She knows I will first chomp my way through Hal's fried potatoes (crisp, superb) before easing my way through the buttery-good portion of eggs with chives and smoked salmon. I know she will pick the crisp vegetables from inside her omelet and eat them separately before devouring their yellow envelope. This may not seem like much (she knows my eating rituals, I know hers), but in this knowledge there's something more enduringly romantic than the clink of champagne glasses or the sexual promise of chocolate mousse by candlelight — there's the romance of hard-won intimacy, of time and shared awareness. For me, such feelings of love come easily in the morning, over breakfast, when the night's illusions have passed and I sit with my inamorata, watching her disassemble her omelet, just as I knew she would.

POLLYANNE HORNBECK

The two of you are led by a comely hostess into a private Tijuana love shack, tucked away safely from the Hollywood hairspray set who would disturb your night of love at **Maria's Ramada** (*1064 N.*

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